

**Appearance Commission Minutes
City of Newton, NC
Meeting on Thursday, April 25, 2013**

Attendees:

Melvin Caldwell	Tom Rowe
Jan Freeman	Bill Sigmon
Jim Gargis	Collette Touchette
Alicia Rayfield	Sandra Waters

Guests:

None

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chairperson Collette Touchette called the meeting to order and welcomed members.

II. Approval of Minutes

The April 11 meeting minutes were approved.

III. Old Business

A. Membership

1. The new member, Bill Sigmon, was formally welcomed.
2. Collette and Sandra recommended including a Volunteer Member on the Appearance Commission. Although the volunteer would not be a voting commission member, he/she could participate in commission monthly meetings, projects, and other initiatives. This member would not be required to live within the Newton city limits as is required of voting members. Melvin made a motion that the commission allow volunteer membership. Jan seconded the motion.
3. Ms. Ana-Cristina Godoy's name was introduced as an excellent candidate for this role. Collette asked Jan to draft a volunteer invitation letter to Ms. Godoy..

B. Way Finding Sign Committee Report

1. Collette reported that the Way Finding Committee has been disbanded. Rob Power is now the project director for all Way Finding activities.
2. The city has written a draft contract for someone to do branding at a price of approximately \$30K. This process will be implemented over a 3-4 year period

C. Apartment Complex Landscaping

1. Collette reported that the Frye Avenue Apartment Complex is a Planned Development Complex and the Spring Avenue complex is a six (6) unit apartment grouping. Due to the different classifications, landscaping requirements might be different.
2. Collette noted that she was uncertain of the definition of a buffer area and would like a clear understanding. Tom shared a brief definition.
3. Collette will continue to investigate the landscape requirements for these buildings.

D. Appearance Commission January Work Session Report

1. In January, members were asked to submit, prioritize, and discuss ideas for the commission's goals and projects. These ideas were consolidated at a Saturday work session, after which, commission members were asked to prioritize/rank the items.
2. Commission members reviewed and discussed the prioritized work session initiatives. These programs of general community beautification are ranked 1 -10, beginning with the top priority.
3. The commission agreed on the projects that are considered active, those that will be addressed and those that will be tabled for this year calendar year. Names were attached to each goal/project as identifying the lead person for each.
4.
 - a. The Yard of the Month awards program is as an important initiative. Alicia and Jan will continue to head this program.
 - b. The Adopt-a-Spot program ranked second in priority. Collette reports that the application and regulations packet is complete and will be submitted to Sean Hovis for review. Sandra recommended two spots on the City Hall curb areas for consideration.
 - c. The design and installation of plantings at all city entrance signs ranked third. The study and discussion is ongoing. It was recommended that Bill Sigmon evaluate the entrance areas for landscape suggestions.
 - d. The Commission will continue to manage and fund the city's downtown hanging baskets.
 - e. The Commission will continue to recommend and fund the plantings in the downtown planter boxes.
 - f. The Yard Sale ordinance and enforcement ranked 6th. The ordinance requires a final review by the Appearance Commission, the code enforcement officer, and the city attorney.
 - g. The design of an inviting entrance to the A Street entrance will continue as a priority. Collette and Tom shared previous progress and discussions that are underway. It was noted that previous plans had been developed by Tim Elliott. Collette will obtain copies of those plans.
 - h. The "Block/Neighborhood Clean-Up" program will be placed on hold at this time due to lack of funds.
 - i. The commission will continue to coordinate with the Recreation Department in the selection and maintenance of the city banners.
 - j. The tenth ranked initiative, "Keeping Newton Beautiful" poster and essay contest will begin in the 2013-14 school year. Jan will coordinate the program.
5. Commission members reviewed and discussed the prioritized work session proposal of ways in which the commission will work with individuals, agencies and organizations that bear upon the appearance of the city. These items are listed in descending order.
 - a. Collette reported that the city has placed the "Big Sweep" on hold due to the lack of money this year.

- b. The work with the Code Enforcement officer to set up an elderly/veterans' assistance process is complete as of March 2013. This group of volunteers ready to help will be referred to as "The Good Samaritan" group.
 - c. The Appearance Commission's close work with the Streetscape and Tree Board committees is in progress.
 - d. Collette is attending and serving on other boards and agencies in an effort to provide appearance information to and from the Appearance Commission.
 - e. The commission would like to form partnerships with area Garden Clubs, scouts, school organizations, extension agencies, and other pertinent groups. Collette asked Jan to represent the commission at the Shorts/Jean's Garden Club, providing them with Adopt-a-Spot information and other initiatives in the future. Collette has received a commitment from Master Gardeners to adopt, fund, and complete a spot. Sandra reported that the local scout troops will continue to play a role in initiatives as we request.
 - f. The bulb planting program through the Master Gardeners was discussed as an important initiative and will be broached this summer, prior to the fall planting schedule, Collette will contact the Master Gardeners about participating in this project.
6. Commission members reviewed and discussed the ideas for studying visual characteristics and problems of city areas. These are ranked 1 – 5.
- a. The study of the city entrance areas is in progress. Bill Sigmon was asked to submit recommendations.
 - b. The schedule of reviews/evaluations of parks, cemeteries, and entrances was discussed. Sandra reported that the commission has informally reviewed these areas for many years; she will make a list of the city areas to submit to Collette. The commission will determine a best approach for scheduling the annual/bi-annual reviews.
 - c. The study of new sidewalk configurations will be placed on hold at this time.
 - d. The maintenance (preparation and painting) of city light poles was the next priority. Collette shared an email and pictures from Tim Elliott (submitted to the county manager and mayor and forwarded to our commission) of the peeling paint on the stoplight poles and other smaller poles in the downtown area. The poles were painted approximately 15 years ago and are currently in poor condition. Sandra reported the status of her investigation into the cost of preparation and repainting of the poles. David Blair, a Sherwin Williams representative, examined the poles and gave an estimate of \$500 for the paint removal and epoxy and polyurethane paint. Sandra can utilize the Parks personnel to complete the labor, pending the use of a bucket truck. She hopes to complete the project in June. Collette did offer the services of the Appearance Commission to help paint the light poles.
7. Commission members reviewed and discussed the ideas for preparing plans for the improved appearance of the city. Several of these initiatives are in progress or study.

- a. The design of the medians at the intersections of Hwy 16 and 10 and at Little's is in progress. Bill Sigmon will present preliminary designs.
 - b. The commission would like to begin a search for grants to enhance the city's appearance. Melvin will contact Rob Powell and Melinda Herzog
 - c. The commission would like to develop a plan for incorporating art features such as sculptures or murals using local artists. Collette will speak to Ana-Cristina on leading this project.
8. Commission members reviewed and discussed the ideas for formulating and recommending the adoption or amendment of ordinances that will serve to enhance the appearance of the city.
 - a. A top priority is the cleaning and removal of graffiti on buildings. Tom, Jim and Melvin mentioned several buildings of concern, in particular the North Newton Clyde Fabrics and Carolina Mills buildings. Collette recommended this be an item on the review/evaluation process. Tom said he will examine these areas and report graffiti issues to the City Council. He will also identify the ordinance that addresses graffiti in the city.
 - b. The commission will work closely with the Code Enforcement officer to determine needed ordinance updates and changes.
 - c. The recommendation for zoning changes will be placed on hold at this time.
9. Commission members reviewed and discussed the ideas for promoting public interest in and an understanding of its role. The following nine initiatives were shared:
 - a. The Eat Smart/Move More project is almost complete. Sandra reported that when the signs are ready, they will be placed at predetermined locations; at that point, project completion can be publicized.
 - b. The commission's request to update the website for communicating activities and goals is underway.
 - c. Melvin discussed the importance of another avenue of communication, an Appearance Commission Facebook page. Jan and Melvin will lead this project after Melvin receives the go-ahead from the city.

E. Review of Business Owners Questionnaire

1. Collette reported findings from the February 2013 responses. This survey serves as a gauge to determine business owners' support of and interest in appearance improvements.
2. Topics of interest to our commission include concerns about the obstruction of sidewalks with sale items and plant hangers without hanging baskets. No final decision was made on the empty plant hangers.

IV. New Business

A. Grace Church Parking Lot Landscaping

1. Collette showed pictures of the new parking lot.

2. Tom explained the landscaping needs and how it has been resolved; therefore, eliminating further commission discussion of the project.

B. June Spotlight Article

1. Collette has invited the Code Enforcement officer to attend the Appearance Commission meeting on May 9. He has several items of interest to highlight.
2. Alicia recommended that he write the article for the quarterly newsletter(s). It will be discussed at the May meeting.
3. Melvin suggested one ordinance that might be of interest, the height of grass recommendation. Collette reported that it is permissible for companies to install satellite dishes at the best location to receive service (i.e. front of homes, lawn or street views) per FCC regulations; however, the ordinance states that the dishes can only be installed in the rear and side yards. Collette will discuss the process for ordinance changes with the Planning Department to bring this ordinance in line with the FCC regulation, if necessary.

C. Website Development

1. Collette and Sandra shared progress on the website development. Collette has requested a meeting with all city committee chairs/designees to discuss components of the website.
2. Sandra has submitted information, including committee officers, to Sean.

D. Spring Banner Selection

1. Sandra reiterated the need for new banners.
2. Alicia and Jan were asked to review and report suggestions for new banners at the next meeting.

E. Evaluation of Downtown Appearance

1. Collette brought up the suggestion that the Appearance Commission develop an evaluation/audit process to systemically review the downtown appearance.
2. Collette shared slides of problem spots on Brady Avenue which included a dumpster, road obstruction, landscaping needs, light poles, etc. She recommends dividing streets amongst commission members as a means of managing/conducting the audit/evaluation.
3. Alicia recommended tabling this assignment for several months due to the amount of projects and initiatives underway. Discussion ensued. Tom reports that Public Works is understaffed and will likely not be able to assist with audit findings. Collette recommends we go forward with the discussion at the next meeting.
4. Sandra shared the tentative plans for preparing and painting the poles (see III. D.4)

F. Review Process and How the Commission Fits In

1. Collette is working with Sean Hovis to include the Appearance Commission in the new Business Landscape Review process.

G. Meeting Room for Future Meetings

1. Collette polled members for their interest in holding future meetings at the Recreation Department in lieu of Zanders.
2. Sandra noted several dates that the commission will have to hold meetings in an upstairs conference room due to large scheduled activities utilizing the downstairs facility.
3. Members were in agreement to hold meetings in the Recreation downstairs room.

H. Meeting Adjournment

1. Collette adjourned the meeting.
2. The next meeting will be held on May 9, 2013 at 7:00 P.M.

Notation: Highlighted sections denote an “Action Item,” requiring action by one or more commission members.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jan Freeman
Secretary, Appearance Commission
4/26/13